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Parnassus

*Fall
1996*



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Parnassus

Inter-Arts Magazine
of
Northern Essex Community College
Haverhill, Massachusetts 01830

Fall
1996

Parnassus is the name of the mythological mountain home
of the nine muses who inspired humankind in the arts.

The policy of the editorial staff has been to select material for the magazine democratically. We have read each work submitted and viewed all artwork. We voted to determine eligibility: a majority vote for a piece meant publication. *Parnassus* provides an opportunity for new artists and writers to reach others; it's a showcase of Northern Essex Community College student creativity.



Pamela Nestor

Parnassus

Parnassus

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After Labor Day

The summer gypsies left and took with them
Their tawny, sun-bleached kids and barking dogs,
Day-glo bikinis and blaring radios,
Sneakers and beer cans and french fries—
All swept away on the first sharp wind of fall.

The beach is bare now, and the sand is cold.
The fog insinuates itself among the dunes
Where yellowed grasses whisper to themselves.
Twisted skeletons of driftwood lie, shipwrecked,
Tangled in the seaweed's salty coil.

A man detecting metal in the sand
Gleans the gold of careless summer days.
A woman standing at the water's edge,
Watches the spotted harbor seals at play
Far out among the rocks at the jetty's end.

At twilight people come to fish the surf,
Dressed warm against the raw Atlantic air.
Their bobbing lanterns make a dialogue
To stand against the coming of the dark.
To stand against the coming of the cold.

Pat Bishop



Norman A. Lee

Contemplation, Consolation on a Pretty Sunday Morning

Just for now, for the hour, I will sit quietly
beneath the sprays of creamy flowers
beneath the smooth heart-shaped leaves
of my beloved winding old linden tree
upon the ancient twisting lichen wall
upon those stones where Anne sat long ago
just down the road from her...Simon's house.
They say she came here alone. As do I.
With just her private thoughts, pen and verse.

Just for now, I will be magnanimous, kind
push aside the blackberry vines which choke
the dying grass around the tilting stone of
poor misguided Timothy Swan, d. Feb. 1693—
just six months after his sickness, his words
sent at least one woman marching to the gallows.

Just for now, I will not dance
to foolish glee above his dusty bones,
taunting him with Martha's curse—her blood, mine
the same...mingling, flowing across the centuries
above this one accuser's eternal earthen home.
no, instead I will share the sweet wild violets
these picked for young John Allen's grave alone;
over there now, see? Imagine. What irony!
her little nephew, d. 1712, lying just twenty paces east—
from this sad, molding effigy.

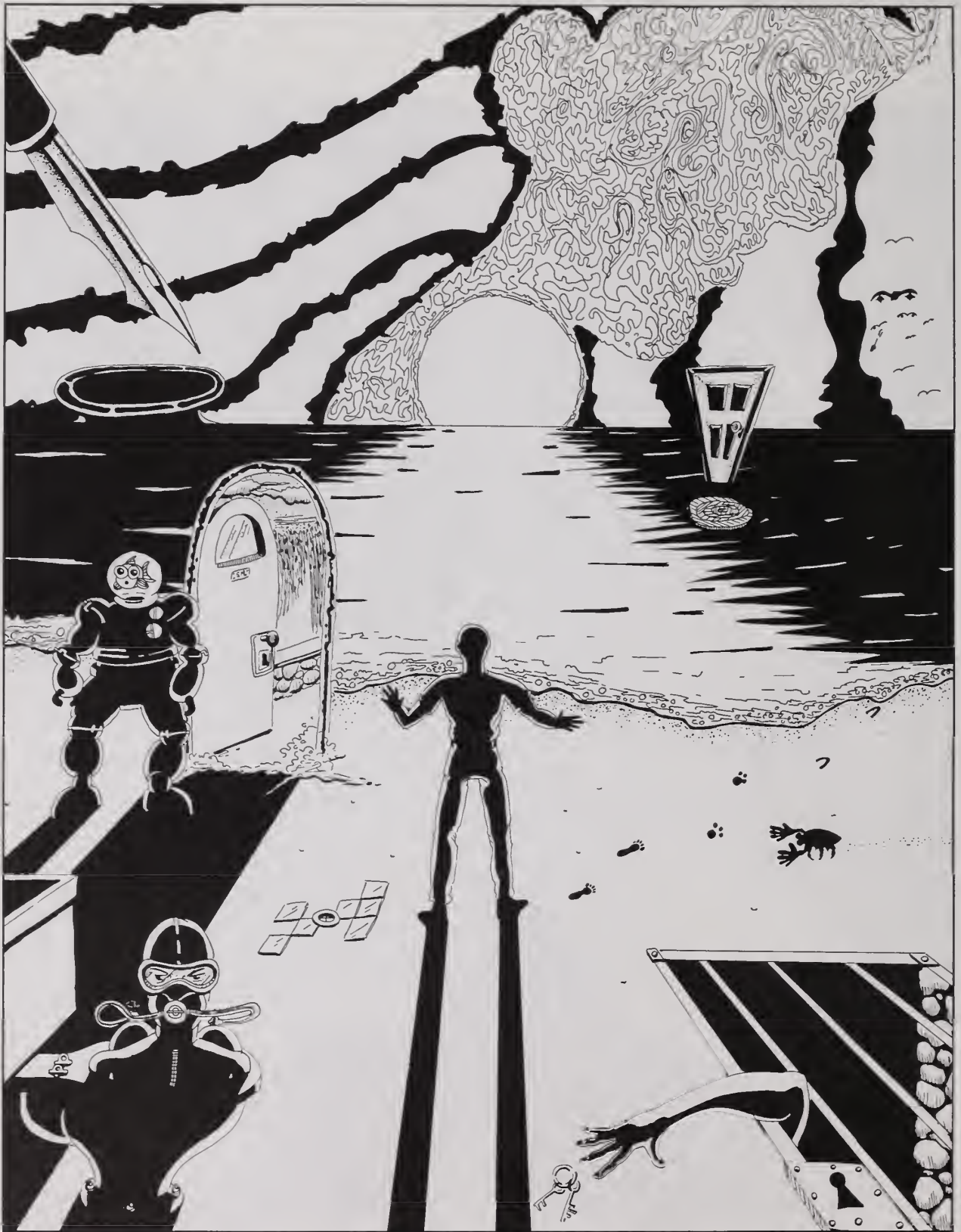
Just for now.

For the one lovely moment, the one brief hour alone
Within this golden, shaded quiet place
I will allow the heart to sing its silent song
Among the listening stones.
I will allow the dead, the living,
All to rest in peace.

Marilyn (MJ) Wagner



Louise Cramer



Shawn Merrill

Driving

Suddenly she was there. I came around the corner and she sprang into view. In the middle of the lane. The middle of MY lane. Wearing a white dress, with long white hair, she looked like an angel. But she wasn't. She was a girl, a small one, only about four.

I was moving fast, going at least 45 on this little neighborhood street. Way too fast. Too fast and I knew it as I saw her appear out of nowhere, running into my lane. She stopped, stared into my car, into my eyes, frozen like a photograph. There was never any time to think, time for a single immediate reaction and that was it. My foot slammed down hard, I thought I'd break the pedal, while at the same time my hands tore at the wheel. I didn't want to turn. I wanted to rip the car over backwards, somersault it over on its back in my lane, stopping it dead, the only way I could be sure to avoid this young child in the road. But I couldn't, no strength, no way to pull the car off the road, roll it back away from this angel girl. I threw it to the left. Across the other lane, into an electric pole.

I heard screams, mine, someone else's, it didn't matter. I saw that girl, standing frozen across the street from me. She looked scared and confused. The pole crashing through my window looked like a jagged dancer, alive with sparks from the broken wires flying around it.

Frozen

I was four years old when it happened. My mother had given me a new dress, an Easter dress, and I was trying it on. It was white, like a wedding gown, like an angel's shroud. A perfect snow white dress, quite expensive I'm sure, but I wanted to go out and play in it. I was pouting, throwing a fit just for fun. I remember my mother screaming, "No! No! Stop, don't run in the street!" But I did, I did it just to spite her.

I've never forgotten the look on the driver's face. I think it's the only clear memory I have from my childhood, that terrible look frozen in my mind.

The sickness there, the fear, when she realized she would kill me. Was going to kill me. I saw her think it, that my body would be crushed and broken under her speeding car.

It's only a snapshot of that woman though. There's no feeling attached. I wasn't feeling anything at the time. Just floating. I may have felt nothing then, but the feeling came in time. Guilt. Guilt has been it, the major feeling of my life.

For fifteen years I've felt like I was living her life, like each day I had was borrowed from her. You'd think it would lessen with time, that I would let go and move on, live my own life. But it gets worse. She was young, she was twenty. I'm twenty now, and I feel like I have to be twenty for her. Like I owe her a good time. I don't know who she was, or where she's buried. I wish I did, wish I could go to her grave and thank her, or at least apologize.

I didn't have to be in the street that day. I ran into the street to annoy my mother, to spite her, to throw it in her face that I could disobey her, and nothing would happen to me. And nothing happened to me.

Sierra Frank

Two poems by Justin Chase

Shelf

I think that perhaps
there is a place to go
where there may be a nice warm snow.

That in it
I could lie quite comfortably
to lie my last and die.

In this place
it might be fun
to dance all day
in the bright warm sun.

To see the birds
and sky so clear,
to not be bothered by drugs or beer.

To be alone within myself
and sit upon that sacred shelf.

That we are all aligned together,
at one with peace
and at peace forever.

The Salamander Priest

The salamander priest
rambled
 on a single word.
While the great blue heron
drifted lazily by.

You are senile
 you old
salamander priest.
We need something new.
 You say too much
without saying anything,
and you think the
same as your
 father's
 father.

That book that
you read to us.
 How do you know
how true it is?

You must die
 you senile old
salamander priest,
and I will kill you.

Moments Reclaimed

I gave my heart a time ago
For you to hold and me to know
When I came back to reclaim
My soul, my heart, my life had changed.

My smile wasn't made of gold
I'm sure you've heard the story told
Of laughter hiding thoughts so bleak
No words of comfort could you speak.

All the days it seemed to rain
The brightest did not ease my pain
No one saw, no one heard,
The pain inside which I endured.

The beach we walked, hand-in-hand
Naked feet on golden sand
Free from words, you held me tight
Your tender touch helped make things right.

I gave my heart a time-ago
For you to hold and me to know
When I came back to reclaim
My soul, my heart, my life had changed.

Jamie M. Jackson



Erik Miriambaldi



Benjamin C. Jenkins

God Carries an Automatic

There was a war on. The forest rang with the chatter and shrieks of it. The leaves on the trees were turning brown and yet few acorns fell to the forest floor. Thin squirrels could be seen darting across the forest, searching every tree, every bush, for food. They were beginning to get desperate. The Gray squirrels would raid the caches of the red squirrels and vice versa. Humans, walking through the forest, would see them fighting and look at the corpses and walk a little faster. Most of the fighting centered around the bird feeder of Mr. McVey, who lived on the forest's edge. It was around this feeder that Chuck and his group gathered.

"Do you think they will come today?" asked Fred.

"They came yesterday, and the day before that," replied the group leader, Hank. "And they will come tomorrow and the day after that. And we will be here. We will guard this feeder which God has clearly given to the Gray squirrels."

"Well I pity the dumb Red who tries to steal God's nuts today," said William, showing his sharp incisors. He said "nuts" although there was only seed in the feeder, but to squirrels anything they eat is called nuts.

The squirrels all considered Mr. McVey their god for he was the one who filled the feeder. In spite of this fact, Mr. McVey considered them slightly cute rodents who had been disturbing his birds lately. He was a retired cargo manager who spent many lonely hours watching his bird feeder and the guests, that's what he called them, who came to dine from it.

Lately everytime he looked out his kitchen window he would see either squirrels fighting or sitting in a tight ring around the tree in which his feeder sat. The first time he saw it, he couldn't believe his eyes, the cute rodents were killing each other and acting generally weird. In the past two weeks he had seen seven fights outside his window. And the damn things were scaring off his birds.

He could think of no way to keep the squirrels from fighting around his tree, moreover, he was worried about the reason for it. Why had they been attacking one another? He looked out his bay window and saw the ring of squirrels around the tree. They looked peaceful enough today. Maybe they had been fighting because it was mating season or something. If they kept quiet, he might even get to see a few birds today.

Around the bird feeder the Gray squirrels were nervous. One never knew when the Reds might attack.

Chuck was not a violent squirrel, in fact he could remember when none of them were. They had always had little to do with the Red squirrels, and had never before fought with them. He wished that this year had been better, that he could just collect nuts until it was time to rest for the winter. "How do we know that this feeder is only for us?" he said. "Perhaps God meant it to be for all squirrels. I bet if we all searched for nuts in the forest and shared the Holy Tree with the Reds, there would be enough for all."

Dave, the Gray squirrel's prophet, was outraged. "Do you doubt the will of God, Blasphemer? Do I have to remind you of the dome God placed atop the sacred Nook to keep the Reds out? He revealed His will to me alone. In a dream He showed me how to leap from a parallel branch into His sacred feeder. This shows us that it is His will this be ours."

Dave stood on hind legs, daring any to deny the will of God.

"But the Reds do this as well," said Chuck under his breath.

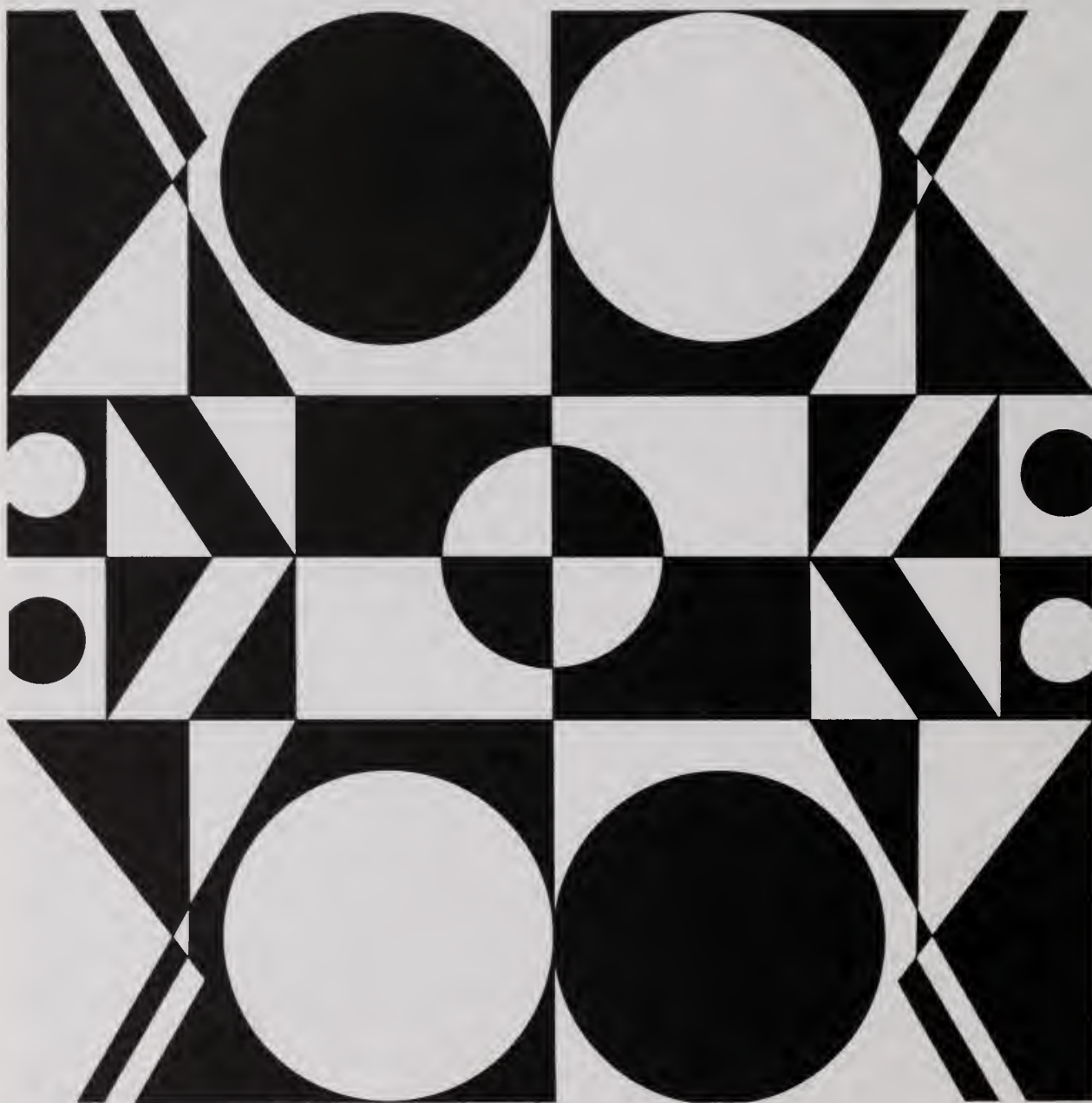
Dave heard this and ran in front of Chuck. Leaning his head towards Chuck until he was almost a part of him he shouted, "A Red deception! A secret stolen by Red spies who will all learn the wrath of God when the time comes. Now shut-up or we will throw you into the Road Of Very Large Trucks, as we did with the other blasphemer, Susan."

Chuck had rather liked Susan. She had refused to fight. She said she was a Conscientious Objector. She had talked to him about "the oneness of rodents" and some other things he didn't understand. Yet he still liked her. Dave got pissed and had her thrown in the roadway. Chuck still remembered her flattened form. He shut-up.

Just then a morning dove landed in the feeder. It looked down at the squirrels and started to strut around the feeder, pecking occasionally.

"Get out of there, stupid pigeon!" cried Dave. "God has given this tree to us."

The dove continued to feed. This blatant disregard for God's will was too much for Dave. He hurried up the tree, full of righteous indignation. The bird flew off, but not before she left a present for Dave.



Christine Hadley

Dave, wiping the poop from his muzzle, cried out, "You will know God's wrath when we push your eggs from your nest next spring."

Chuck snickered into his paws. As if in answer, great gales of laughter came from the hill next to God's house. A group of Red squirrels that were gathered up there were rolling on the ground in their mirth.

"Oh shit, the Reds," said a frightened Fred.

"Kill the Heathens!" cried Hank charging up the hill.

"Or maybe we could just wait for...", started Chuck. He was interrupted by a wild-eyed Dave who had grabbed his tail and started to drag him up the hill.

"God drives over cowards, up the hill!" he shouted.

The rest followed and there was horrible row with bodies of Gray and Red squirrels flying through the air. One of the Reds bit Dave on the nose. This made him so angry that he ran around in circles sputtering over and over, "Dod's wath uton ou all!" Some of the Red squirrels managed to get into the feeder during the tumult and ran off with pouchfuls of seeds.

With the Reds squirrels running off, Hank ordered the Grays back to the trees. Some were too tired to stand and just lay on the ground in a ragged circle. Hank had killed one of the Reds and plucked a hair of his right forearm to mark it. He was almost bald there.

Chuck could only look at the dead squirrel on the top of the hill.

Mr. McVey called to his wife, "Martha, I'm afraid we have some rabid squirrels out there."

His wife looked out the window and saw a bunch of thin, ragged, and rather chewed up squirrels around the tree in the back yard. "They don't look normal to me either, Sam. What're ya gonna do 'bout it? I don't want to have to get shots after some deranged rodent bites me."

"I'll take care of it tomorrow," said Mr. McVey sadly, for he was a kind man. He used to like to watch the antics of the squirrels. To him they were guests at his feeder. He wasn't even mad when the squirrels had found a way around the expensive squirrel exclusion device he had installed on his feeder. What he had to do now would cost him much more than that device.

On the far side of the hill the Reds had gathered around the small pile of seed they had managed to "liberate" from the oppressive Grays. Their leader sat on top of the pile, talking to his troops.

"Tomorrow we liberate the holy tree from the hated infidels. We will attack in force and drive them from the land which God has clearly given to us."

A young Red squirrel in their midst opened his muzzle and asked, "Couldn't we just try to share with the Grays? Maybe the nuts will still come and then this fighting will have been for nothing." He didn't see the point of all this fighting, the Grays were just like them. They were only a little bit larger and had different colored fur.

"Shut-up," said the Red leader, "or I will have you thrown into the Road of Infidel Squashing Trucks."

The next morning the Grays were still surrounding the tree, the Reds were gathering in force on the opposite side of the hill, and Mr. McVey was going to Wal-Mart.

The morning breeze was growing steadily stronger. This made the tree sway and some seeds fell out of the swinging bird feeder. These were quickly gathered up by the Gray squirrels on the ground. Hank faced his troops, gazing at them through serious eyes. "Our intelligence indicates that the Reds are gathering all their forces. They must be desperate and hope to defeat us in this last ditch effort with numbers and surprise." They all quickly stood up on their hind legs. They searched the area around them, expecting Reds to jump out from every bush and from behind every log.

"Today we drive the hated Grays into hell," said the Red leader. Their conception of hell was a world encompassing freeway on which it was always rush hour. "Some of you have suggested that we share with them, some of you have said they are the same as us. Many of you with those views we have thrown into the Road of Infidel Squashing Trucks. But to those of you who still harbor doubts I say this." He puffed himself up and stared up into the clouds. "God has shown me in a dream that they are all sons of gerbils. Yes, and yea, since the first squirrel killed his brother and was turned into a gerbil by God for it, they have been cursed. God forces them to run on The Wheel of Insanity, running eternally and never getting anywhere. They probably have false tails. And God himself told me that we should go among them and break open their heads like acorns in His name." The Reds thought this speech was nifty and got really keyed up. Their tails twitched with excitement. They raised their voices in one cry, a sort of high clicking noise, and charged over the hill.

Mr. McVey was in his room taking a long object from a new leather case. He looked out his window. There were dozens upon dozens of squirrels engaged in vicious fighting. Lucky he had gotten the automatic model.

Chuck looked around nervously. All around him the squirrels were biting and clawing one another. Hank and the Red leader each had their paws on the other's throat and were throttling one another. He knew he should bite somebody but he just stood there with his paws raised, jumping around. A Red came up and bit him on the tail. It was too much for him. He took to his paws and ran. He ran in leaping bounds until he was out of the melee and climbed into a nearby tree. From there he looked on in sadness as the squirrels below mauled each other.

He heard an odd noise from God's house and looked to see God leaning out a window with a long black stick clutched in His hands. Perhaps He had come to watch His chosen people drive out the interlopers, whoever they might be.

There was a loud noise, like when lightning hits a tree, and suddenly the Red leader's chest exploded. All the squirrels stopped fighting and looked towards God.

"God has stricken down the chief heathen with lightning from heaven. Glory be to God

and we shall live in the land of nuts aplenty," called out Dave, just before his head was blown off.

"God only missed," cried some of the Reds. "He was aiming for the infidels."

They argued back and forth for a minute, and just as the realization hit them that God was aiming for everybody, they all lay dead.

Chuck watched God's retribution from his tree. He didn't know how to feel. He should be mourning the loss of all his friends, but he just wasn't. A branch in the tree to his left swayed, and he saw a young Red looking over the battlefield. The Red sat there very still and very quiet.

Chuck felt no anger, no sadness. It was as if he were empty and waiting for emotion to fill him. He sat in contemplation over this for a while yet he couldn't figure it out. He wasn't very smart, and he had never cared for any of this in any event. As he was thinking, the wind picked up and all the trees swayed very hard. He had to grip the branch he was on hard to keep from falling. A rain of acorns fell to the earth.

He and the young Red squirrel descended from their trees and started to gather the new-fallen nuts.

Michael Puffer



The Day You Were Born

The day you were born
was the first day of the new year
You started making your way a full day before
Turning, kicking, punching
Flexing your tiny muscles
Preparing for your entrance into the world.
I had waited long for you
Readying your crib, your name.
I would call you Jamie
For months
over and over
I tasted your name

Our suitcase was packed for the hospital
Your tiny clothes
Folded carefully atop mine

I dreamed of our debut
Mother and child
Proceeding up the street
Stopping for neighbors
To coo and tickle
Stopping for strangers
To see and sigh

I dreamed of your first smile
Your first word, "Mama"
Your first steps toward me
Careening toward me
Our arms outstretched
Mouths open in joy and laughter and pride

I dreamed of your first day of school
Seeing you to the bus
With lunchbox and backpack
You running headlong
Toward the world
Confident and fearless
Polite and sensitive
Happy and empathetic
All the qualities
I could bestow and instill

I dreamed that you were the clay
And I the potter
Lovingly, I would mold you
Into all you could be
You would be the pitcher
Pouring your confidence and sensitivity
Onto everything you encountered
My Baby New Year
The day you were born

Sharon Klufits



Norman A. Lee

The Last Fisherman

There's no owner
hasn't been for about 3 years
only the head of the family kept them all afloat
He passed on the tradition
and he passed away

A brother and a friend
he was next in line
walked along the shore,
never disembarking

Though he could fish,
and stay afloat just as well,
the fisherman would not go
his family was the sport

Now it's his time to pass on
leaving the lonely boat behind
The waves never beneath,
so the memories rock and sway

The grandson, grandnephew
It's his turn to feel the ocean
he needs to preserve the fond memories
of a family game

Being the last fisherman,
it leaves all the responsibility,
For if he can't pass it on
the boat will be empty.

Julie Anastasia Shea

The Attic

“Housie,” I heard a faint voice say from outside the room, “you up here, man?”
“Yeah, come on in, man.”

Chris was out of breath when he finally found the door and came in. “You gotta get a light out here, man, I almost killed myself!”

He threw his keys on the table and fell into an old cushioned rocking chair opposite me. “Whew, I’m outta shape, man, three flights of stairs and I’m fucking dying. You oughta build an elevator up here.”

“Yeah, that would be cool, huh?”

Chris chuckled over his panting. He took out a pack of Camel Lights and asked if I wanted one.

“No, I just put one out.”

“You’re sure now?” He had a mischievous smirk on his face. He reached into his pack and pulled out a joint.

“Spark it up, man!” I said.

I had been living with my mother for about two years now. Probably about six or seven different places. First it was relatives. My Aunt Lydia, my Aunt Diane, then my grandmother (my mom’s mom, of course). That went on for about a year until we found this place. My brother, Brian, was with us, but as I look back now I can really only see myself and Chris, and the Attic.

“So what’s up with that drill sergeant guy? Are you still talking to him?”

There was a soft gray cloud of smoke lingering between us as Chris stared at me with glassy eyes. His face was red. Like he had just washed it with a lot of soap. It was always red and blotchy. His skin was so white, but his face, always blotchy red.

“Yeah,” I said, “he’s a recruiting officer. I don’t know though, I doubt I’ll sign up or anything. Four fuckin’ years, man. And these are the best years of your life you know.”

“No shit, man. And you can’t smoke weed in the Army, dude.”

“Navy.”

“Army, Navy,” Chris said, “it’s all the same bullshit, man.”

I nodded.

It wasn’t until a couple of weeks after we moved in that I discovered the Attic. Our apartment was on the second floor and the attic above us. Out in the back stairway there was a door that led up there. There was a sectioned off room

up there. It took up about half of the attic. At first we would just hang out up there, play cards, get stoned, whatever. After a month or so I had a bed up there and did some redecorating with some friends. Everyone loved the room. It was a great escape. It was like my own private apartment. Separate entrance and everything. It was the meeting place. Everyone would get out of work and go straight there. There was always weed.

I walked into the post office and followed the signs to the Navy recruiting office on the second floor. I had been there once before, but I was still unfamiliar with it. The door was open.

Sgt. Cray saw me. He said my name and told me to come on in. We shook hands and I sat down.

“So, how’s everything going?”

“Good,” I said enthusiastically, “good.”

“Good,” he said. “So did you read through the brochures I gave you?”

“Yup,” I hadn’t even opened them, “front to back, yup.”

“Well, the next move’s yours, Scott, are you still interested?”

I wondered if he felt any sympathy for me. He never really got into details about what the Navy was really like. It was like he was hiding something. His hair wasn’t as neat as I would expect it to be. It was kind of long. His tan shirt was too tight. Not very many medals or anything like that. And he had a southern accent, it sounded somewhat authoritative, but it didn’t seem like he had any authority. It almost seemed like this job was a punishment to him. He was just going through the motions without any emotion or regard. He probably just wasn’t good for anything else, I thought. I’d be good at everything. I would be out there in the Pacific or Atlantic ocean, on a huge aircraft carrier, maybe I would go into the special forces or Navy S.E.A.L.’s. I would be doing exciting stuff.

“Oh yeah,” I said, “I’m ready to take the next step, whatever that might be.”

“Well, there’s a lot of paperwork to fill out, and you have to choose what job you want to learn. Then there’s the physical and after that you’re in. The next boot camp is in about two and a half months, if that’s not too soon.”

“No, that’s not too soon, that would be great.”

We filled out paperwork for over an hour, and



Doug Sirois

he sent me home with a sheet listing job descriptions for me to choose from.

"Just call me when you make your choice, and I'll make an appointment for your physical."

"OK, thanks, sir."

"See ya, pal," he said without looking up at me.

At first I just told them that I burnt out and wanted to take a break from pot. But after about a month Chris started to get suspicious.

"What's the matter, man?" Chris said. "You don't like Mr. Marijuana anymore?" as I passed up the smoldering joint he offered me. The joint went by me and continued on around the circle. There were six or seven of us up there that night.

"No, man, I'm just tired. I worked twelve hours today," I said. Chris finally released his hit from his lungs which he had been holding for about ten seconds. It looked like the tailpipe of a car being started up on a cold morning, smoke shooting across the room. "Plus, I might be taking a physical in a couple weeks."

"What for? The Army?!" he said.

"The Navy."

"Are you serious, man? You're not joining the fucking Navy, are you?"

"No, man. The physical doesn't mean shit. I'll probably just blow it off anyway." But I knew the physical did mean shit. If I went to the physical, there was no turning back. I was in the fucking Navy.

"This fucking weed is a killer man," someone said.

"No shit," someone else said. Everyone was talking in short little squeaks and grunts as they held in their hits. Chris took another hit.

"You're missin' out man," he said. "This stuff's potent."

A few days later I went back to see Sgt. Cray and I told him the job I had decided on. He set up my appointment for a physical the next week. He told me about the mandatory drug test, which I had already known about, and said not to get into any trouble. The physical was the last step before boot camp. Once I saw the doctor and got tested, I would fill out some more paperwork and would be property of the US government. No turning back. He made that

very clear. I assured him that I wouldn't change my mind.

The last week I felt a gradually sloping nervousness building in my body. It was taking over. I could not stop. I could not block thoughts from my mind. I began to think about what it might really be like in the Navy. Four fucking years. That's a long fuckin' time. What if there was a war? I dreamt about being down in the bottom levels of a huge warship in a tiny little bunk bed, my nose inches from the ceiling. Trapped. Four fuckin' years. I couldn't stop thinking about it.

I thought that the Navy might straighten me out, teach me discipline, but four years of it? Would I be making an awful mistake? Would I regret it? Would I be selling myself short by committing to this? What would I miss back home? What would happen while I was gone? Would this change me?

It was Friday. The next morning I would go in for my physical. The final step. It was just after eight. I had just got home from work. I went up to my room and just sat and stared at the ceiling for a while. Thoughts raced through my head faster than I could keep up with them. The Navy. Four fuckin' years. Tomorrow morning. No turning back. I lit up a cigarette to relax. I couldn't think straight. The phone rang. It was Chris. "Hey, you're finally home. Where've you been?"

"Oh, I was at work as usual."

"Dude, I'll be over at nine. OK?"

"I don't know, man, I think I'm gonna hit the sack. I'm tired and I got a lot of shit to do tomorrow, you know?"

"Don't worry, you've got all weekend," Chris said. "Anyway, I've got a surprise for you."

"What?"

"I'll be over at nine."

"What's the surprise?"

He hung up.

I was watching TV when they came up. Chris knocked and said my name. I said, "Come on in." Chris was trying to suppress his smile as he walked in. Two girls shyly walked in behind him.

"Isn't this place cool?" he said to the girls.

"Yeah, it is," one of them said.

They were both pretty good looking. I had never seen them before, or they me. We all sat down and had small talk. I was feeling uncomfortable. A joint would calm me down. A joint would relax me. It would make it easier to talk to the girls if we were all stoned. We would be on the same level. We would be giggly and goofy. They were both pretty good looking.

"Guess what?" Chris said.

"What?"

"The ladies brought some acid."

"Yeah, we got the whole sheet," one of them said.

"And I've got a fresh bag," said Chris. "It's gonna be a crazy night man." As he said this he lightly nodded and gave me that sinister smile I knew all too well.

Chris started rolling a joint. I told them I had to get something downstairs, and I'd be right back. When I went downstairs, I didn't know what to do. I went to the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror.

"Fuck," I whispered. I closed my eyes and rested my forehead on the mirror. "Fuck," I whispered. I was thinking so much I couldn't think anymore. I stood there for two or three minutes. All I could think was that I didn't want to be myself. I didn't want to have to be thinking about this right now. I didn't want responsibility.

I walked out of the bathroom and went into my mother's room. I closed the door and sat on

the bed looking at the phone. Time was devouring me. Chris was waiting upstairs for me. The Navy was waiting for me in the morning. I was being pulled in two directions at once. I was about to break. I heard the theme from *Jeopardy* playing in my head. It was Final Jeopardy, and I didn't know the answer.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. Then I felt sad. I felt sad because I knew at that moment what I was going to do. I felt like I had failed myself. I felt pity on myself. Sgt. Cray would be disappointed. I knew it. But I had given in on myself already. I gave up. I couldn't commit. I felt sad. I felt like someone was watching me and saying, "Poor boy, he almost got himself straightened out."

I called Sgt. Cray and told him I was sorry but I had changed my mind. When I hung up the phone, I felt even more sadness come over me. I had almost done it. I came so close, only to quit at the last minute and make a fool of myself. I almost cried. I would have cried if I had sat there any longer. But I didn't. I went upstairs.

"Where ya been, man?"

"Oh, I just had to take care of something, it was nothing." I had forgotten that the girls really were pretty good looking.

Chris dangled an overstuffed joint from his mouth and flipped it up and down with his mouth at me. I threw my lighter at him.

"Spark it up, man," I said.

Scott House



Kristin Johnson

Reality?

To think
what we consider life
may be but a dream.

Who is the dreamer?
Maybe I am the dreamer
having a vision of myself.

Perhaps the writer
of this poem you are reading
is really you, only you don't realize it.

Possibly what you know,
existing beyond the boundary of vision,
doesn't subsist until you get there.

Could be that your friends,
who have always been there,
are only characters dreamt up in your subconscious.

It is feasible that this world,
the only one you think you know,
is just a fantasy realm that your mind escapes to.

If you try really hard,
maybe you can wake yourself.
If life is only a dream, that is.

Cindy Close

Tuesday.

Called
to say hi, to say hey, to say hi,
Called to say,
but didn't say at all.
Called
and you weren't there, well,
now that I have you here
i guess i'll string you along
and then let you go.
Called to hear you say,
but didn't hear at all.
Called,
so you'd call,
so you'd say,
hi, hey.
Called to ask you.
Called to see if you would.

Angelique Pinet

After his Birthday—

You have kept the wildflowers
In a cut-glass vase
For three days now.
Your fiftieth bouquet.
They have nearly all died.
Sad profusion of pink-blue
Once bright lilac rosy-hued
Waxen petals. All
Fall soundlessly,
Without the slightest whisper
Down upon the worn oak table.
In miserable disarray, they lie
Curled up, shriveling by
The kitchen window.

You freshen the water in the tall crystal glass each day.
Add special green drops, magic tears, potions every night.
Yet, none is renewed, reascent, each droops lower by the hour.
I fear not a single flower, each so delicate, will ever be revived.
Still. Your eyes say they are beautiful, fragrant, light.

You smile, believing I found them
Sunday morning in the field
Beside the small apple trees
Behind the hills
Over by Barker's farm
When, in fact,
In some confusion
I bought them
Hurriedly
At the market—
Already old
They could not last
Each silky crown,
Long past salvation.

This morning I find your desperate efforts cheerless, chilling.
I take no pleasure in your narrow delusion, your brief optimism.
Instead, I grieve. Blood, marrow grow winter cold beneath July sun.
But. Just for the moment I will keep close the thin tired old illusion.
Just for the hour I will allow the weary truth to hide within my silence.

And now, forgive me for although I have not lied,
I believe...I have not told you everything.
And so plead guilty to the unspoken accusation:
I do not love you. I have deceived.

The only gift I might offer you here,
The only vow I might make easily...
The promise is—tomorrow before I go
I will find deep purple-flowering raspberries
And next, pick wild hearts of white, then yellow violets...
Take these and sweet red clover all down to you...
Then close the door lightly as I leave.

Marilyn (MJ) Wagner



Cathy Halkiotis

Questions

When I stand up to leave he stops me, laying two fingers softly on my bare arm.

"Can I get a ride home?" Those are his words, but his eyes are asking much more. Asking if I'll drive him home, and if I'll stop and come in when I get there. Asking me really if I'll kiss him before I go, or give him my phone number, or sleep with him tonight. Or maybe just leave him here to catch a ride with someone else.

He's asking me all the questions that he hasn't been asking all night. They are the questions I felt in his glance when we were introduced. The questions that hid under his voice while he was mixing me a drink. These are the questions his hands asked my hips when he held them tight as we danced, slow half-dancing, our feet barely moving over the lush beige carpet of my friend Ada's condo. His eyes are asking me finally, and I nod a silent yes, holding his stone-blue eyes with my brown ones, so that he can see what it is I'm saying yes to, more than just the ride.

My arm feels cool where his fingers left it. I look away from his intense blue eyes, too familiar and also strange. He looks too much like Alan. It isn't his features really, more his posture which makes my whole body shiver, makes my nerves perk up as if it really were my ex-boyfriend standing only inches away.

I didn't realize at first what made my stomach twist when I saw him, or why his voice while we spoke softly together seemed so comforting. It was only when we were dancing, his hands wrapped around the sharp bones of my hips, the way Alan's used to do, that it suddenly struck me, like a glass breaking. The familiarity, the weird closeness to a perfect stranger—he reminded me of Alan. The same soft mannerisms and gentle, careful touches, the same stone-blue eyes.

Looking into those eyes, seeing Alan's eyes there, I think of the last time I saw Alan. His eyes then were closed, flat rocks, shoved into his face. Shoved into my memory, those cold rock eyes that weren't asking silent questions or sharing secrets across a table, the way this boy's eyes do. The last time I saw Alan, his eyes weren't speaking to me, but he was speaking quietly, telling me about Shannon; about the baby they were going to have; about moving to Virginia, to be with her family.

Ada sees me getting up to leave and quickly crosses the crowded room to give me a warm hug. "I'm glad you came," she whispers close to my ear. "It was good to see you."

I smile and say something polite and meaningless about how glad I am that I came. After Alan left me, I stopped going out. It seemed too weird, after four years, to suddenly be alone again at parties, to be talking to people who had known "us," when now it was only me. So I just stayed in for a while. I pretended to enjoy being alone, but finally Ada, who knew me better than that, began to drag me back out. We hit a club once in a while, or the two of us would catch a movie, but I still stay home a lot. Tonight was a big thing, coming to this party, with all these people I knew from a long time ago, from four years of classes and parties and meetings and rehearsals. From orientation to graduation, I'd known all the people who are moving around me now. They'd known me too. Or rather, they'd known me and Alan. I turn away from them and head toward the exit.

He is waiting for me by the door, watching me approach with hungry, expectant eyes. I stop, facing him in the hallway. His back is square against the door, and he's looking down into my face. There is a long pause. Inside it I am keenly aware of our breathing, the rhythm of both sets of lungs filling and falling, not quite in sync. My arm stretches out, breaking the pause between us, reaching close to his hip, feeling his heat as my fingers catch around the brass doorknob. The bones in my wrist click faintly when I twist it. Moving a half-step closer to him, I push open the door. He turns away slowly and steps out into the cold night.

It is one of those winter nights so cold it seems to have hardened, seems to be frozen diamond-hard with everything in sharp clear focus, each sound, each sight, frozen hard-edged bright and loud. Our footsteps beat a sharp staccato on the concrete as we cross the street, moving into the shadow of an elm, through it to a sharp puddle of streetlight, my car sleeping in its center.

While I unlock the car, he leans against the lamppost, fidgets his feet, looks down at some weeds frozen on the curbside, waiting nervously for me to open the passenger door. Inside, he feels too big for my car. I've grown so used to driving alone that anyone at all riding beside me

seems too big, and he is so tall he has to sit slouched deep in his seat to avoid hitting the low cardboard ceiling. In the car I feel perfectly shaped, certain of all my movements. I realize now that this boy is much taller than Alan, who also used to fit perfectly in my small car.

I smile in his direction, but the smile he sends me back is unsteady. He seems nervous now, out of place in the little passenger seat.

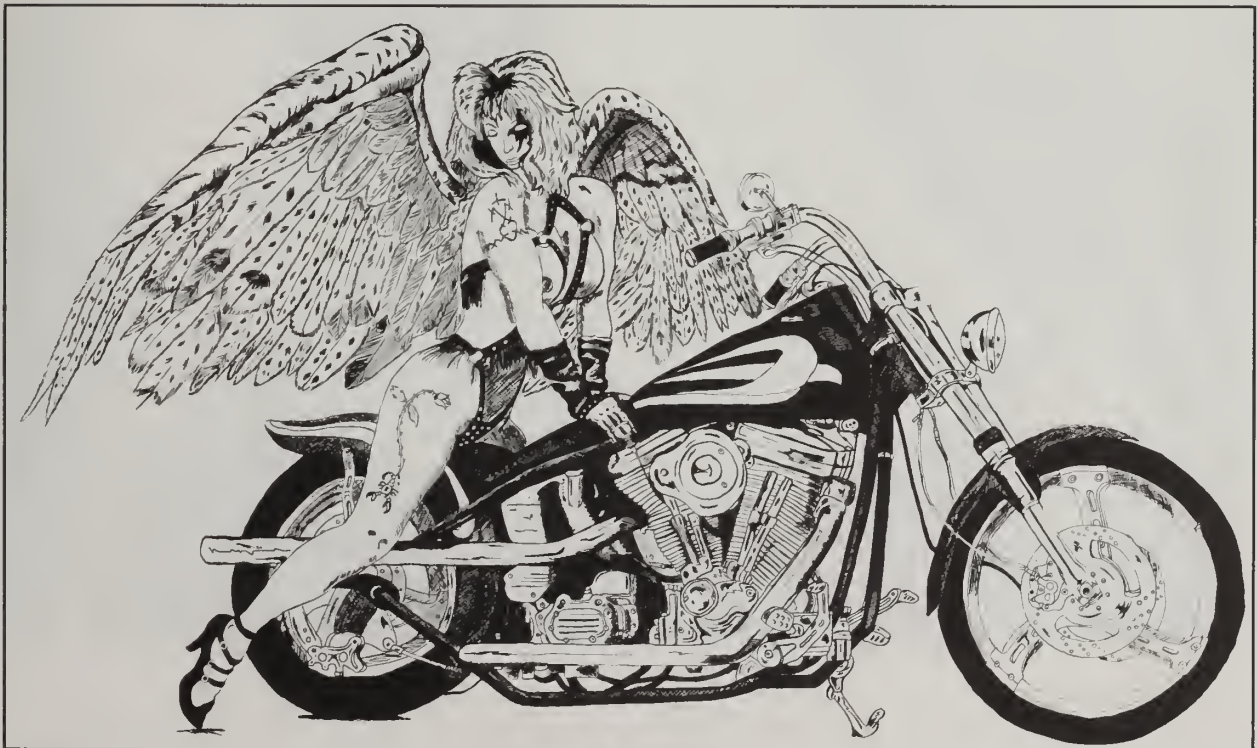
"Why don't you slide the seat back?" I smile a soft intimate smile while he grins widely and forces a small laugh. He reaches down between his knees looking for the lever. Somehow his searching seems very loud in the closed space of my car, and we both begin to laugh to cover the noise of his hand slamming raw metal against metal, plastic twisting as he tries to make it work.

Finally he gives up, turning to me with a larger-than-life expression of defeat, like a comic

actor in a silent movie. Leaning forward across his lap my hand quickly grips the lever. With a small twist his seat suddenly drops back six inches, surprising us both. I look up, he looks down, and it is suddenly painfully awkward. Sitting up quickly, I try not to feel cold across my breasts where his legs pressed into me. I pull away from the curb without speaking.

Driving to his house there is a silent understanding that I am not going home. We agreed upon it with the touch of his fingers on my arm, with the unasked questions in his eyes and my silent nod yes. Now the first step is over, he's riding silent beside me, we're moving down the highway toward his house. The silence is getting too heavy for me; it's making me feel a little nauseous.

I feel suddenly as if the inches between my thigh and his are a million miles long, stretching out across my months spent alone in my apart-



Eduardo Fernandez

ment, across the look on his face that reminds me so much of Alan, across the fact that he isn't Alan, isn't anyone at all in my life but just a boy at a party. Next to this boy I feel suddenly so lonely it hurts. I want to connect with him, make him real, make him fall in love, but no matter how hard I wish to reach out and hold his hand, there is this incredible distance between us, which in a way is really very small. It is a distance made of the four hours we have known each other, of two fingers on my arm and those few unasked questions in his eyes.

A distance made real by my single nod yes and my too-small car humming down the highway toward his house. A distance I can't close because somewhere Alan is still there, a wall standing invisible but wide and high, running right down between the bucket seats of my car, keeping me apart from this boy with his beautiful familiar eyes. I feel how far apart we are, and it grows heavy, as if all that long space and time were coiled rope lying between my shoulder blades.

"Hey," my voice is low, soft. "Hey, you feel like changing the music? I'm getting sick of the Pixies." He looks up at me vaguely while I tell him a story about my best friend meeting Frank Black. It was meant to be humorous, but falls flat in the silent car.

I get a half-smile and a nod from him. "What do you want?" he asks.

I want...a friend. I want...to not feel lonely when there is someone here beside me. I want...you to really be with me here tonight. I want...you not to be a stranger. "I don't care, whatever's down there. Maybe something quiet."

He gives me another quiet nod, obligingly leans down into the pit of tapes floating on the floor around his shoes. I watch his back curve down into the shadows below his seat, hear the

dull clinking of plastic on plastic. After a few seconds he rolls the muscles in his spine and reemerges with a tape held in two fingers and that same vague smile spread across his lips.

I watch his fingers pressing the plastic cartridge into my tape deck, and it makes me wonder what they'll feel like on my hips, spread out across my stomach, running down along my thighs.

I shake the image, make one more attempt at conversation by telling him another story, this one about a childhood memory. The story seems meaningless, told as it was with nothing before it and nothing to come after.

But it makes him laugh a little. Our eyes meet and we smile at one another, a brief smile that slips off his face and he quickly looks down, as if to see where it has gone. I look straight ahead, determined to focus on my driving.

He breaks the silence next, sitting up in his seat to give directions—take exit 21, go left. Red light—he tells me to turn right here. A small neighborhood, series of quick turns onto look-alike suburban streets, his house is the yellow one, third from the corner on the left.

I slide into a sidewalk parking space, slip the car into park, but leave it running. His hand falls to the door latch, but his fingers wait there while his eyes search mine out, find them, hold them, stone-blue pressing on my warm brown. I can hear the question they are asking like a screaming voice, but I want to make him say it. After a timeless moment, he does.

"Would you like to come inside?" I've been hearing this question all night, hearing this question in his eyes and voice caressing me at the party, in his clumsy silence beside me, even in the strange distance spreading across the car. I hear it all like I've been hearing it all night and for the first time all evening I stop and ask myself—Do I want to? Do I want to go inside?

Sierra Frank



Pamela Nestor



Jessica Lattime

The Advent Calendar

The advent of the separation was behind
No door on the calendar...the calendar
He made with handmade hopes inscribed
In our hearts and on my wall, hung joylessly.

Eyes falling upon it softly sleep came.
With faded heart-light, wet upon the pillow
Of lost dreams...I descended into loneliness,
Silence breaking in the vacuous soul.

Within the dream-depths of darkness
Void of soul gave wing to conscious vision.
Following warm rays to their creation,
Out of turbulent nothingness I flew.

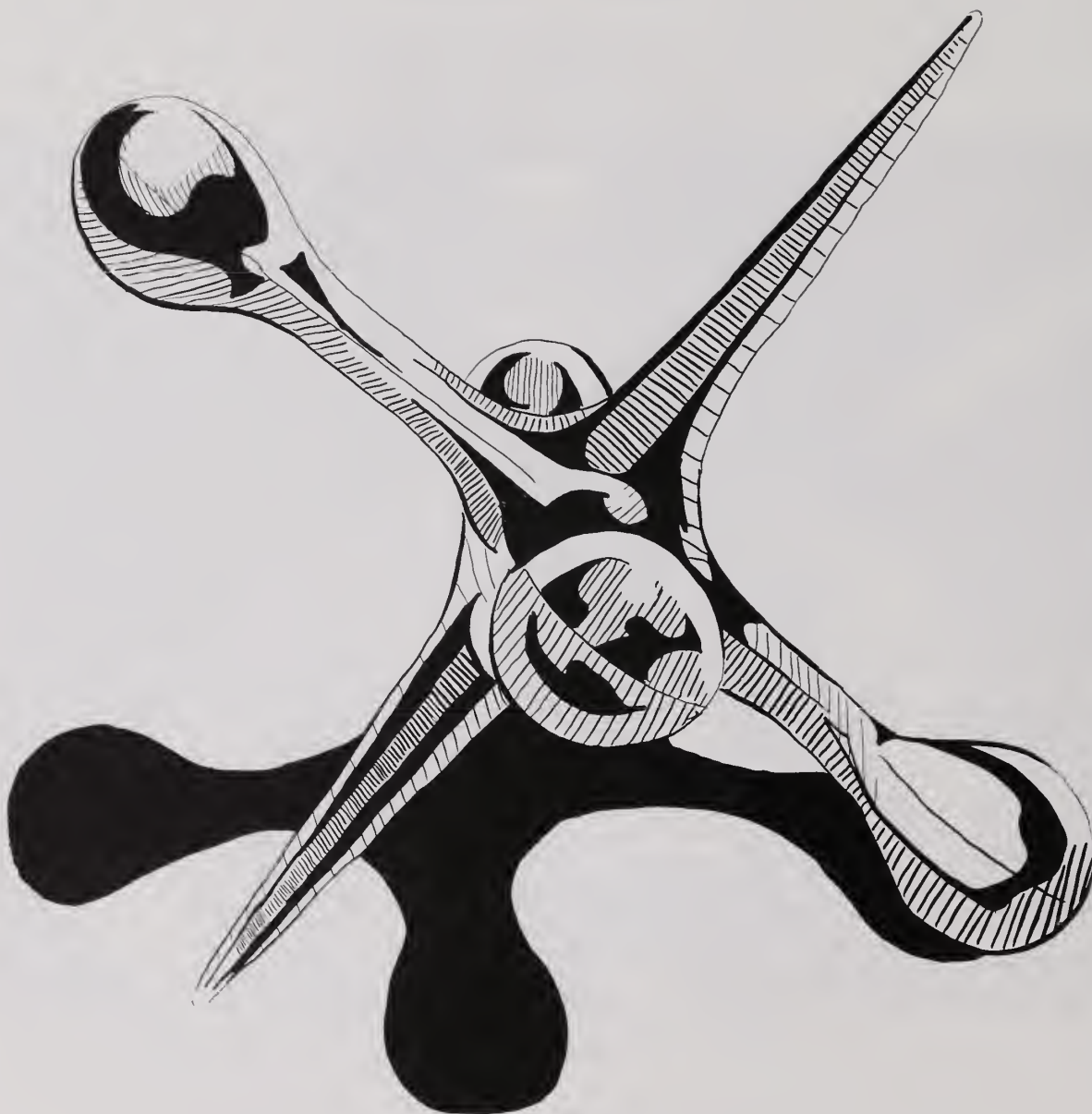
Hope lit the hollow of my cheeks with mizzen
Droplets of loving light, in sadness and in joy
They were celestial tears of the other,
Searching for the face he remembered in love...

The path of heart-light before me revealed him
In his splendor, and from my perihelion I flew
Into his embrace, bejeweled hands reaching
Around me, whispering words remembered...

With eyes opening to the dawn, his soft voice
Remained echoing in my ears and above on
The wall the etchings of a heart beamed
Brightly and once more I felt his bold embrace.

In the morn' we'll meet again with hearts alight,
And in the advent of a reunion the door of one year
Will be there again, and our tears will become our
Light and show us the way into eternity.

Kristin Johnson



Shawn Merrill

Gray Blanket

I am invisible here,
this pile of clothes in the corner
consumed in my thoughts.
Wrapped in this gray blanket of despair.
Going everywhere yet I'm not anywhere.
A casualty of this war inside my head.
A truce is called and raise my white flag,
only to discover it is my gray blanket,
waving with its evil grimace.
Controlling all that I do.
I run from it.
But it waits for me wherever I go.
So as you pass me by...
battles are being fought in my head.
...And the bloodshed is all mine.

Stacie Polecki



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